

Parashat Shoftim 5771, 2011:

*Trust in Hashem: The Secret of the Month of Elul*

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Dedicated to the sacred memory of my sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Yosef Shmuel ben Miriam and Sheva bat Sarah Rivka.

The Hebrew word “*tam*,” and its plural form “*tamim*,” is found five times in Tanach (the Hebrew canon of Scripture) as a description of Noach, Avraham (i.e. Avram), Yaakov, and Iyov (Job). In broad terms, it connotes completeness, perfection, sincerity, honesty, awe of Hashem, and the desire to flee from evil. By way of illustration, Iyov is described as “a sincere (*tam*) and upright man, G-d-fearing and shunning evil.” (*Sefer Iyov* 1:9 and 2:3, this and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) Significantly, it is also found as an adjective referring to Hashem: “The deeds of the [Mighty] Rock are perfect (*tamim*), for all His ways are just...” and, in our *parasha*, to any individual among the Jewish people: “Be wholehearted (*tamim*) with the L-rd, your G-d.” (*Sefer Devarim* 32:4 and 18:13)

Our *parasha*'s use of the term “*tamim*” needs to be understood in its proper context. The verses that precede and follow it depict the heinous “magical” practices of the seven indigenous nations of Canaan:

When you have come to the land the L-rd, your G-d, is giving you, you shall not learn to do like the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who passes his son or daughter through fire, a soothsayer, a diviner of [auspicious] times, one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or a charmer, a pithom sorcerer, a yido'a sorcerer, or a necromancer. For whoever does these things is an abomination to the L-rd, and because of these abominations, the L-rd, your G-d is driving them out from before you. Be wholehearted with the L-rd, your G-d. For these nations, which you are to possess, hearken to diviners of [auspicious] times and soothsayers, but as for you, the L-rd, your G-d, has not given you [things] like these.

Let us briefly review the main points of this passage:

1. In general, the Jewish people must not emulate the despicable practices of the Seven Nations.
2. Specifically, divination via fire-based “determination” (Molech worship – Rashi), any manner or variety of soothsaying via signs or omens, and any and all variations of sorcery or necromancy are all proscribed and labeled as abominations.
3. Rejection of “diviners of [auspicious] times and soothsayers” is a fundamental component of our being *tamim* with G-d.

The linear-linkage in the above-found passage is crystal clear. Repudiation of all forms of divination leads to being “wholehearted (*tamim*) with the L-rd, your G-d.” Rashi (1040-1105), basing himself upon the halachic midrash to *Sefer Devarim* known as the *Sifrei*, explains the content of being *tamim* with Hashem in the following manner: “Conduct yourself with Him in a direct fashion and depend on Him, and do not inquire of the future; rather, accept whatever happens to you with equanimity and then, you will be with Him and a part of His portion.” Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrachi (c. 1455 – 1525 or 1526) is famous for his super-commentary on Rashi’s analyses and explanations. He suggests the following explication of Rashi’s words:

“Being with the L-rd your G-d” is precisely the reward that accrues for wholeheartedness (*temimut*). It is tantamount to saying: “When you will be wholly dedicated to Him, then you will be with Hashem your G-d.” ... That is to say: “Be wholehearted with Him and then you will be ‘with the L-rd your G-d.’”

In light of Rashi’s explanation, as seen through the lens of Rav Mizrachi’s interpretation, *temimut* – in the sense of solely relying upon Hashem - emerges as one of the cornerstones of *bitachon*, i.e., faith and trust in Hashem. This idea was formulated with beauty and inspiration by *Dovid Hamelech* (King David) in the well-known words of

*Sefer Tehillim* 115:9-11: “Israel, trust in the L-rd; He is their help and their shield. House of Aaron, trust in the L-rd; He is their help and their shield. Those who fear the L-rd, trust in the L-rd; He is their help and their shield.” The message is crystal clear: G-d, and G-d alone, is He upon whom we should trust and depend.

We are now in Chodesh Elul (the month of Elul). It is preeminently the period of the year wherein we look back at what we accomplished and what we failed to accomplish. We look back, as well, on the priorities that we set, and the legitimate ones that we failed to keep. Moreover, we look back on the commitments to Hashem that we made, and those that we unfortunately did not keep. It is a period, therefore, during which we reflect upon the famous words of *Shlomo Hamelech* (King Solomon), as presented in the third chapter of his masterful examination of the human spirit known as *Kohelet*:

Everything has an appointed season, and there is a time for every matter under the heaven. A time to give birth and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to uproot that which is planted. A time to kill and a time to heal; a time to break and a time to build. A time to weep and a time to laugh; a time of wailing and a time of dancing. A time to cast stones and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing. A time to seek and a time to lose; a time to keep and a time to cast away. A time to rend and a time to sew; a time to be silent and a time to speak. A time to love and a time to hate; a time for war and a time for peace.

Given Elul’s singular importance and meaning, we may well ask ourselves: “Are we really ready for its existential and soul-searching demands?” I believe that in some ways we may never be truly ready. Yet, at the same time, if we actively try to be *tamim* with our Creator, trust solely in Him, and make concerted and conscious efforts to look to Him for meaning and guidance, then we have a much better chance of preparing ourselves for Elul’s multilevel challenges and the majestic G-d-Man encounters of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. With G-d’s help, may this Elul be the time when we are *tamim* before Him

and have the will and desire to grow spiritually in His Torah and Mitzvot. *V'chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

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<http://reparashathavuah.weebly.com/>

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added please do not hesitate to contact me via email at [rdbe718@gmail.com](mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com).